



# what's up?

## depression and suicide

### INFORMATION FOR ADULTS WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

#### What's it all about?

Depression and suicide are both serious problems for teens. Nationally, serious depression affects more than 5% of adolescents and, in Washington, suicide is the second leading cause of death among teens. Depression is a feeling of sadness, helplessness and hopelessness that lingers over time. Untreated it can lead to alcohol abuse and even suicide. It can be difficult to begin the discussion about depression and suicide with a teen, but make the effort. Pay attention to warning signs for depression and suicide and get help for the teen in your life.

#### What are the details?

##### Depression

- Nearly two-thirds of teens with clinical depression go unnoticed and may not get treated.
- According to the 2002 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey, more than a quarter of 8th, 10th and 12th graders report feeling so sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 weeks that they stopped their usual activities.
- During adolescence, girls are twice as likely as boys to develop depression.

##### Suicide

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Washington's 15- to 19-year-olds.
- An average of 2 young people, 10 to 24 years old, take their lives each week in Washington.
- On the Washington State Healthy Youth Survey, nearly 1-in-5 6th and 10th graders report that they seriously contemplated suicide in the past year. Of these, over 60% say they made a suicide plan.
- Males 15 to 19 years old are 5 times more likely than females to complete suicides.
- Firearms are the most common method of completed suicide among 15- to 24-year-olds in Washington.
- One-third of the youth suicides with firearms occur during the hours right after school: 3 to 6 p.m.

#### Why does it matter?

Most of the time, people who kill themselves have given definite signals or talked about suicide. The key to prevention is knowing the warning signs and what you can do to help.

##### Think about this:

- The presence of a loaded gun in the home is the single most powerful risk factor for suicide.
- Some studies indicate that gay, lesbian and bisexual youth have higher rates of suicidal thoughts and attempts than heterosexual youth.
- Reasons given for considering or attempting suicide include: feeling overwhelmed and inadequate, being depressed, using alcohol and drugs to deal with emotions, experiencing past or current sexual abuse, and experiencing serious family fights.
- 8th and 10th graders in Washington who report being physically abused by an adult were 3 times more likely to say they thought about committing suicide and 4 times more likely to say they attempted suicide than non-abused youth.
- Adolescents with learning disabilities are at increased risk for depression and are more likely to report having attempted suicide than their peers.
- Nationally, the suicide rate is almost 2 times higher for adolescent male American Indians and Native Alaskans.



## DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE INFORMATION FOR ADULTS WHO CARE ABOUT TEENS

### What can I do?

If you sense a teen in your life is troubled, depressed or thinking about suicide:

**Show you care.** Let them know you really care. Talk about your feelings and ask about theirs. Listen carefully to what they have to say.

*"I'm worried about you, about how you feel."*

*"You mean a lot to me. I want to help."*

*"I'm here, if you need someone to talk to."*

**Ask the question.** Don't hesitate to raise the subject. Talking with young people about suicide won't put the idea in their heads.

*"Are you thinking about suicide?"*

*"Do you really want to die?"*

*"Or do you want your problems to go away?"*

**Get help.** Do not try to handle the situation on your own. You can be the most help by referring the teen to someone with professional skills to provide the help needed, while you continue to offer support.

Resources for help:

- Crisis telephone hotline 1-800-SUICIDE
- School counselor, teacher or coach
- Private therapist, counselor, clergy or religious leader
- Mental health agency or hospital emergency room

#### For all the teens in your life

- Form good relationships with young people. Listen, observe, talk and interact. Spend time together.
- Help youth cope. Help teens see how their own strengths get them through these changes.
- Remove firearms or unnecessary medicines from your home.

### Recognize the warning signs for depression and suicide

- Previous suicide attempts.
- Talk of suicide, or making a plan.
- Giving away prized possessions.
- Expressions of hopelessness, helplessness and anger at oneself or the world.
- Themes of death or depression in conversation, writing, reading or art.
- Statements of not being missed if dead.
- Recent loss of a friend or family member through death or suicide.
- Other losses, such as loss of a parent through divorce.
- Strong personality changes, withdrawal, aggressiveness or moodiness.
- New involvement with high-risk activities.
- Sudden dramatic decline or improvement in schoolwork.
- Use or increased use of drugs and/or alcohol.
- Chronic headaches or stomach aches, fatigue.

**hot  
links!**

Washington State Department of Health  
DOH Pub 910-121 11/2003  
[www.doh.wa.gov](http://www.doh.wa.gov)

Resources listed here are provided as a public service and do not imply endorsement by the State of Washington.

References for source materials are available from the Child and Adolescent Health program, 360-236-3547.

For persons with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats. Please call 1-800-525-0127.

National Suicide Hotline 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)

Youth Suicide Prevention Program [www.yspp.org](http://www.yspp.org)

National Mental Health Association [www.mentalhealth.org/suicideprevention/concerned.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.org/suicideprevention/concerned.asp)

Kids Health [www.kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/suicide.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/suicide.html)

"Understanding and Preventing Teen Suicide"

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry [www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)

Go to Facts for Families, "Teen Suicide" (Fact Sheet #10)

National Institute of Mental Health [www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/depchildmenu.cfm](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/depchildmenu.cfm)

Child and adolescent depression resources

American Academy of Pediatrics [www.aap.org/advocacy/childhealthmonth/prevteensuicide.htm](http://www.aap.org/advocacy/childhealthmonth/prevteensuicide.htm)

"Some Things You Should Know About Preventing Teen Suicide"

National Adolescent Health Information Center <http://youth.ucsf.edu/nahic/img/Suicide.pdf>

Washington State Healthy Youth Survey 2002 [www3.doh.wa.gov/HYS/](http://www3.doh.wa.gov/HYS/)



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# P R I N T I N G   S P E C I F I C A T I O N S

**Title:**    **What's Up? Information for Adults Who Care About Teens  
"Depression and Suicide" Fact Sheet**

**Size:**    8.5 x 11

**Paper stock:**    80# text white gloss

**Ink color:**    4-color process

**Special instructions:**    2-sided printing with full bleeds

**DOH Pub #:**    910-121